

This exciting new initiative is designed to prepare underprivileged students for college. Gear Up is a competitive grant program and supports early college awareness activities at both the local and the State level.

Specifically, this initiative will award multiyear grants to locally designed partnerships between colleges and high-poverty middle schools plus at least two other partners, such as community organizations, businesses, religious groups, State education agencies, parent groups or nonprofit organizations, to increase the number of students going to college among the low-income youth.

Gear Up partnerships will be based on the following proven strategies: working with a whole grade level of students in order to raise the expectations for all students; starting with sixth or seventh grade students and continuing through high school graduation with comprehensive services, including mentoring, tutoring, counseling, and other activities such as after-school programs, summer academic enrichment programs, as well as college visits; promoting rigorous academic coursework based on college entrance requirements; informing students and parents about college options and financial aid, and providing students with a 21st century scholar certificate—an early notification of their eligibility for financial aid.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge and encourage all local educational agencies to get involved in applying for this important grant. It is my firm belief that mentoring programs such as Gear Up can make all the difference in the lives of our middle school students.

A mentor may be the person who makes the difference by providing a role model for positive behaviors, like studying hard and staying away from trouble, by helping with academic work, by encouraging the student to take the right college-preparatory courses, or by providing extra moral support and encouragement.

We have a fantastic opportunity to help our local students—their future success depends on our leadership now. They fail if we fail to live up to our responsibility to ensure them the strongest chances for academic success.

Mr. Speaker, expanding after-school opportunities is a top legislative priority for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

Our President is committed to triple funding for the 21st Century Learning Center Program, which supports the creation and expansion of after-school and summer school programs throughout the country.

Experts agree that school-age children who are unsupervised during the hours after school are far more likely to use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, commit crimes, receive poor grades, and drop out of school than those who are involved in supervised, constructive activities.

The program increases the supply of after-school care in a cost-effective manner, primarily by funding programs that use public school facilities and existing resources.

In awarding these new funds, the education department will give priority to school districts that are ending social promotion by requiring

that students meet academic standards in order to move to the next grade.

The President's budget includes \$600 million in fiscal year 2000 to help roughly 1.1 million children each year participate in after-school and summer school programs.

I have visited many of the schools in my congressional district. I have listened to teachers, principals, supt's, and schoolboard members. I have suggested they try converting schools to "After School Community Centers." After school snacks, tutoring, mentoring, homework, organized sports, theatre, number sense.

I strongly support funding for this program and urge all my colleagues to do the same.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about an issue that is near and dear to my heart, women in business, specifically women-owned small businesses.

As the mother of four and a former small business owner myself, I know just how hard it is to balance the full-time job of being a mother and then adding to it the challenges of owning and running your own business.

From women-owned construction firms to women-owned public relation firms to Donna, Jo-Jo, and Angela who own Donna's Hair Design in my own district town of Chappaqua, New York, all of these women deserve all of the support that we here in Congress can give them.

Everyone needs to remember that small business is the most important sector of our economy. Currently, in the United States, there are approximately 8.5 million women-owned businesses. That is 8.5 million women-owned businesses, 36 percent of all businesses in the United States. These 8.5 million businesses employ 23.8 million employees. These businesses have seen their sales increase from \$2.3 trillion to \$3.1 trillion in just the last 6 months.

My congratulations to all of the hardworking women who are doing more than their share to contribute to the economy of our Nation.

The number of women-owned small businesses have increased by 89 percent in the last decade. During the same period, these businesses have increased

their revenue by 209 percent. Women are a force to be reckoned with in today's economy.

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During my life, I have had many roles: The mother of four, a public school teacher, a college professor, a rape crisis counselor, a professional patient advocate, a small business owner, and now a United States Congresswoman.

I have learned countless lessons in these roles and have brought them with me to the House of Representatives. Many of these lessons were learned as a small businesswoman. This has given me some insight as to what women need in order to fully compete with their male counterparts, and for this reason I have devoted my energy to working with the Committee on Small Business to enable small businesses to run more efficiently.

I have introduced legislation again this year that expresses the sense of Congress regarding the need to increase the number of procurement contracts that the government awards to women-owned businesses. The Federal Government is America's largest purchaser of goods and services, spending more than \$225 billion each year, and women should have more access to these projects.

In 1994 Congress set a 5 percent procurement goal for women-owned businesses. Five years later, however, the rate of procurement for women-owned businesses is 1.9 percent. This percentage is a poor reflection on the access to these jobs when considering the rate of growth of women-owned businesses.

I want to continue to do what I can to improve the procurement process for women in this Congress, and I am happy to say that a few weeks ago the House passed H.R. 774, The Women's Business Center Amendments Act of 1999. This bill authorized appropriations of \$11 million for the expansion of this program in fiscal year 2000.

I want to congratulate the chairman of the Committee on Small Business, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. JIM TALENT), for his work, as well as the ranking minority member, the gentlewoman from New York (NYDIA VELÁZQUEZ), and many other people who worked to make this accomplishment here on the floor of the House.

Currently, there are 60 centers now operating in 40 States. These centers assist women in many ways, including helping them to focus their business plans through courses and workshops, providing information on capital, as well as helping the women choose their location. The centers have the freedom to tailor their programs based on the needs of the communities in which they work.

Recently I have been able to meet with many women business owners and some of the women who run these centers and heard firsthand the challenges and the successes of these businesses. These are just a few of the issues that